

A redescription of '*Asilus*' *alastor* Walker, and its transfer to the genus *Apiocera* (Diptera: Apioceridae)

by

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SYNOPSIS

The South African species *Asilus alastor* Walker, 1849, described in Asilidae, is redescribed from the type specimen and transferred to the genus *Apiocera* Westwood, in the family Apioceridae. Walker's species is not closely related to the other two species of *Apiocera* known from South Africa.

In 1849 Francis Walker described a South African fly as *Asilus alastor* Walk., in the family Asilidae. This species was based on a male specimen collected in South Africa by Dr. Andrew Smith. Since its description *alastor* does not seem to have been recognised again, and Ricardo (1922: 53), in her revision of the South African Asilinae, stated that "*Asilus alaster*" (sic) should be deleted from the list of species as its type could not be found. Hull (1962: 546) includes the species in his list of described Ethiopian species of *Asilus* Linn.

The type of *alastor* is in the British Museum (N.H.), correctly placed in the collection of Apioceridae and among the species of *Apiocera* Westw. to which genus *alastor* in fact belongs. Up to the present two species of *Apiocera* have been recorded from Subsaharan Africa (Paramonov, 1950), namely *A. braunsi* Melander and *A. africana* Paramonov, both from South Africa. I have seen part of the type series of *braunsi* and the type material of *africana*, and find that these two species, while closely allied and similar to one another, are quite different from *alastor*. From them *alastor* differs, *inter alia*, in being obviously larger and more robust, in having a proportionately much longer proboscis, the palp (in the male at least) of quite a different shape, and both black and yellowish-white bristles on the antennae.

The unique specimen of *alastor*, according to the British Museum's accession book, was collected in South Africa along with a large number of other insects by Dr. Andrew Smith and donated by him in 1844. No further information is available about the type locality. One would expect that so conspicuous a species would have been found again in

the hundred years since its description, but I was unable to locate any specimens in the collections of Diptera in the South Africa and Transvaal Museums, despite the extensive field work undertaken by their staff members in arid parts of Southern Africa suitable for *Apiocera* species. As *alastor* is so different from the other two regional species (both now represented by a fair number of specimens in museum collections) the possibility exists that its type in fact did not come from South Africa, and was accidentally included with Smith's material. If no further specimens of *alastor* are found, this possibility must be investigated.

The specimen of *alastor* bears a label carrying two notes, each in a different hand; one reads—"Fam. Apioceridae, Gen. Ripidosyrma Hermann, syn, *Apiocera braunsi* Melander"; and the other reads—"Note by Dr. G. Speiser, June, 1914." There is also a small label, "30A", possibly the collector's.

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Apiocera alastor (Walker) n. comb.

Asilus alastor Walker, 1849, *List Ins. Brit. Mus.* 2: 444-5.

♂ *Holotype*: Frons convergent, relatively narrow, at vertex its width relative to transverse diameter of head 19:90. Ocelli in elongate triangle, anterior ocellus almost twice as far from posterior ocelli as latter are from one another. Proboscis (see fig.) elongate, fairly

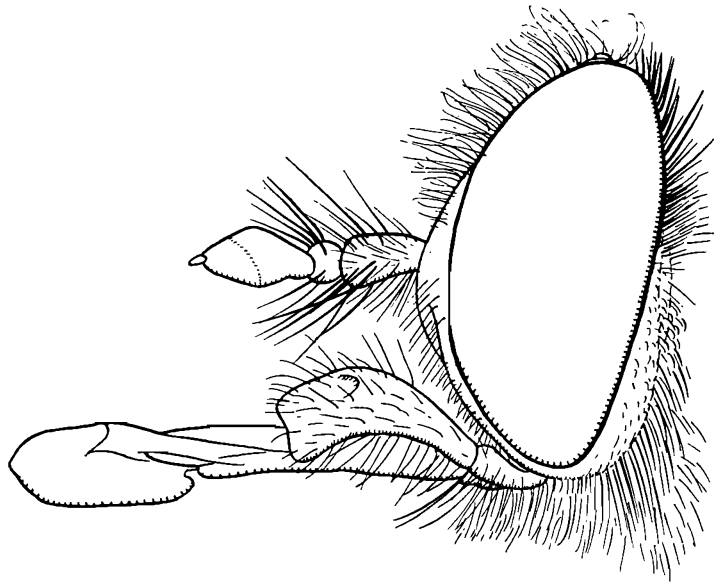


Fig. 1. Head of holotype ♂ of *Apiocera alastor* (Walker) in side view. Note that the third antennal segment is slightly twisted, its dorsal side away from the viewer, and that the white hairs and bristles are shown as black in the drawing.

slender, longer than vertical diameter of head, with appressed labella. Palp progressively flattened and broadened apically, truncate at apex where it is so thin as to be translucent.

Frons ashy-grey except for yellowish-grey lateral borders and reddish-brown lines bordering median groove beneath anterior ocellus. Hairs of frons and vertex dark brown, fine and crinkly. First and second antennal segments brownish with sparse greyish pubescence, bearing fine, pale hairs and much larger, stiff, radiating bristles which are either blackish-brown or yellowish-white; larger dark bristles on first segment equal to length of that segment, pale bristles equal to lengths of basal and second segments combined; on basal segment the dark bristles mainly on dorsal surface, a few on outer lateral surface, pale bristles mainly on latero-ventral surface, second segment with only a few of the fine, pale hairs, otherwise with dark bristles arranged in radiating, median circle broken on inner side, a few pale bristles included in ventral part of this circle; third segment obscurely brown, with differentiated dark-brown area over apical portion. Parafacials yellowish-white tomentose with fine yellowish-white hairs. Palps pale yellowish-brown, apical segment with fine, pale hairs only, basal segment with some stiff, bristle-like, pale yellowish-white hairs in addition to many fine, pale hairs. Proboscis blackish-brown. Occipital fringe dense, whitish, the hairs stiff and fairly thick, on upper part of occiput some strong, dark bristles mixed with fringe.

Mesonotum and pleura largely discoloured and rubbed; on anterior part of mesenotum two greyish-white, dorsocentral vittae enclose a brownish median vitta which is divided in midline by a narrow, paler brown line. Abdominal segments 1-7 dark brown on tergites, dull pale orange on sternites, hypopygium contrasting blackish-brown. Claspers with apical tuft of long, creamy hairs.

Wing relatively short, reaching back to hind margin of seventh tergite; ambient vein absent around auxillary lobe and alula (as in *africana*).

Length of body (excluding mouthparts, antennae and apical tufts of claspers) about 19 mm. Wing length about 10.5 mm.

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